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R. H. CARNIE and M. F. MORAN

Sir Walter Scott and the Maitland Club

Edgar Johnson, Scott's scholarly biographer, in his formidable *Sir Walter Scott: The Great Unknown* makes no mention of the fact that the laird of Abbotsford was, in the last three years of his life, a member of the Maitland Club of Glasgow. This club had been formed in March 1828 by John Kerr, and some other Glaswegians interested in books, on the model of the Bannatyne Club of Edinburgh, of which Scott had been one of the founder-members and first President.¹ The Glasgow antiquaries had similar aims in the collection and publication of Scottish history, antiquities and literature to the Edinburgh society and were later to co-operate with them in the production of volumes of interest to both societies. There was, and still is, a traditional rivalry between the two cities, but the Glasgow society were delighted to have members from the Scottish Metropolis, and particularly one of the eminence of Sir Walter Scott. Another of the great Scottish publishing clubs, the *Abbotsford* (1834-65) celebrated in its name Scott's continuous interest in the antiquities of his own country, and is a fitting tribute to Scott's membership of, and interest in others, such as the Roxburghe, the Bannatyne and the Maitland.² There is no evidence that Scott ever attended a meeting of the Maitland Club. He was, at this period in his life, in a state of increasing ill-health, and under pressure from a tremendous work-load. However the short correspondence printed below, between John Kerr, a Glasgow lawyer,³ self-confessed biblio-

¹ See E. Johnson, *Sir Walter Scott The Great Unknown* (New York, 1970), p. 805.

² See W. E. K. Anderson, *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott* (Oxford, 1972), entry under 5 March 1829, where Scott notes the fact of his membership of the Maitland Club and jokes about his membership of similar societies.

³ John Kerr was a writer, i.e., a solicitor in Glasgow. He was a member of the Faculty of Procurators of Glasgow (1823). As an enthusiastic club-member, he contributed to John Strang's *Noctes Sma' Weftianae* (Glasgow, 1849). He also contributed to Robert Malcolm's Glasgow newspaper *The*

maniac and vice-president of the Maitland, and Scott, is largely about the activities of the Club and clearly reveals Scott's intelligent and helpful interest in its activities. The correspondence has not, as far as we know, been published before and the Scott letters are not to be found in *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by Grierson, 1932-37.

Scott joined the Maitland Club on the same day as his son-in-law, John Gibson Lockhart. They were both admitted on 2 March 1829. Scott had been nominated on 21 January 1829 by Joseph Bain, advocate, Glasgow, Robert Pitcairn, W. S. Edinburgh, and the antiquarian lawyer James Maidment, all of whom were already members. Bain wrote to John Kerr on the day of nomination: "Now as to admissions—this now is a matter of serious determination for us, our members being so nearly completed. About Sir W. Scott and Lockhart there can be no difficulty. We are honoured by the first name, and the second, connected as he is with our town should be one of us. . . . Sir Walter spoke to Maidment of his own motion and requested him to propose him as a member of the Maitland."⁴

The Earl of Glasgow, the President of the club, wrote on 1 March expressing his pleasure at being able to vote for Scott's admission. It is also recorded in Kerr's "Notabilia" that Scott received thirty-four votes out of thirty-five, and Lockhart twenty-six. Bain expressed his delight at Scott's membership in a letter to Kerr on 3 March, observing: "Sir Walter might perhaps as well have been unanimously chosen, but it is of no consequence, tho' no one was ever admitted to the Bannatyne by an unanimous vote."⁵ Lockhart commemorated both his own and Scott's membership of the Maitland by presenting as his contribution to the Club in 1838 Cochrane's *Catalogue of the Abbotsford Library*.⁶

Scots Times. He was vice-president of the Maitland Club when it was founded and on several occasions afterwards, and served on the Editorial Committee of the Club. The surviving member of his law firm, Barrie & Kerr, presented Kerr's four manuscript volumes *Notabilia of the Maitland Club* to the Library of the Faculty of Procurators, Glasgow. These volumes are now in the possession of the Library of the University of Calgary.

⁴ *Notabilia*, Vol. 1. Letter Joseph Bain to John Kerr, 21 January 1829.

⁵ *Notabilia*, Vol. 1. Letter Joseph Bain to John Kerr, 3 March 1829.

⁶ *Catalogue of The Library at Abbotsford*, (Edinburgh, 1838). Lockhart's short note explaining why he had chosen to celebrate Scott's association

In the correspondence which follows—which was apparently initiated by Kerr in sending to Scott a special issue of one of William Motherwell's books, one can see both in Scott's concise letters and the rather wordy epistles of his correspondent much of that love of and interest in things Scottish which so typified the legal literati of the first few decades of the nineteenth century.

Letter 1. John Kerr to Sir Walter Scott.⁷

15 Blythwood Place,
Glasgow 18th June 1828.

Sir

I am almost ashamed to request your acceptance of the accompanying volume, so thoroughly *Glasgowish*⁸ is its appearance. Yet as the work is one of very considerable merit & quite akin to some of your own labours, and as *six copies only* have been printed on coloured paper, I am anxious that you should possess one. The truth is I ordered the printer of the work to attend to these copies on my account, trusting the whole detail to himself—and now that the result is before me, I have only to regret that I did not inspect the sheets before they were sent to press, and take better care both of the paper & of the arrangement of the pressman's form.—

Of the six copies before alluded to, four are now in the possession of the editor,⁹ (an excellent friend of my own & an able investigator

with the Maitland this way is dated 2 July 1838. The volume was edited by J. G. Cochrane and was also a Bannatyne Club publication.

⁷ NLS MSS. I am grateful to that library for providing photocopies of Kerr's letters to Scott, and permission to publish the material.

⁸ Although a patriotic Glaswegian, Kerr was sensitive about comparisons between Edinburgh and Glasgow publications in terms of sophistication. The language he uses in this letter to describe Glasgow: "our town of Saltmarket baillies, rum punches and sugar hogsheads" is also used in his description of the Maitland Club in the *Scots Times* 19 September 1829. He says proudly in that article of the first publication of the Maitland Club that there was nothing "Glasgowish" about it.

⁹ Kerr does not name the book he was sending to Scott. It was, almost certainly, Wm. Motherwell's *Minstrelsy, Ancient and Modern*, (Glasgow, 1827). Two copies of this work are listed in the Abbotsford Catalogue, and one of them is described as a special issue on pink paper. (*Catalogue*, p. 176)

of the merits and demerits of ancient Scottish poesy) the publisher,¹⁰ the printer and myself—the fifth has been bestowed on a personal friend Mr Joseph Bain advocate—and the sixth, I trust, will be permitted to occupy a place on your shelves.—

I have the honour to remain
Your most faithful servant

John Kerr

P.S. It will not be uninteresting to you to be informed that a humble imitation of the Bannatyne Club has recently been attempted here. I believe I must take the greatest portion of the blame in originating *the Maitland*¹¹ (so called in honour of the excellent collector Sir Richard) but I hope yet to see not a few volumes issued under its auspices into the notice of the literary antiquary, tho' I dare not dream of any publication which wd confer honour on any other city than our town of Saltmarket baillies, rum punches and sugar hogsheads.

J.K.

Letter 2. John Kerr to Sir Walter Scott.

15 Blythswood Place
Glasgow 23d June 1829

Sir

I had an opportunity two days ago of examining cursorily the library of the late Lord Stonefield¹² at Levenside House; and in the course of my examination I found a volume of tracts in which one appeared that may be of use to you in the work you are now

¹⁰ The publisher of Motherwell's volume was John Wylie, bookseller in Glasgow in whose shop the idea of the Maitland Club germinated. He was the Club's first secretary. (*Notabilia* Vol. 1.)

¹¹ The founders of the Club had originally thought to call it the Dillon Club after a prominent Glasgow citizen who was one of the original members. John Dillon declined the honour 15 March 1828. (*Notabilia*, Vol. 1.)

¹² A judge of the Court of Session.

preparing for the Family Library.¹³ It is in 4to & consists of two leaves only. Its title is at the head of the first page—"letter from Paris October 1717." On glancing it over I found it stated in the commencement that the English letter was a translation of a letter from Bologne dated 12th September, and that this letter contained a narrative of the Earl of Peterborough's seizure on the preceding day (he had lived in Bologne from the 5th to the 11th Sept.) by the Pope's Legate and his immediate confinement in the Fort Urbine upon an accusation of having come to Italy "to get some assassins there to murder the Chevalier St. George." In the narrative it is stated that the Earl embarked in this undertaking on the instigation of the English ministry, and that his apprehension was the result of direct application from the Chevalier himself.—

I do not know whether you have seen this tract; but if you have not, & at the same time conceive it to be of the least use to you in the composition of the Earl's biography, I shall copy it for you on Sunday next when I am again to be at Levenside. If you have already seen and used this tract I have had the trouble of writing & you of reading this letter in vain.

I remain

Sir

Your very faithful Servt.

John Kerr

Letter 3. Sir Walter Scott to John Kerr.¹⁴

Dear Sir

I am obliged by your kind offer and being in great distress for materials of some novelty respecting Peterborough I do not hesitate

¹³ Scott had been asked by John Murray to write a biography for his *Family Library* series and Scott had suggested a life of the Earl of Peterborough or one of John, Duke of Argyll. Scott's interest in Peterborough dated from 1808 when he had edited *Memoirs of Captain George Carleton* for Constable. It is clear from this and the following letter that Scott was collecting material for this uncompleted work in June 1829. cf. E. Johnson, p. 1097.

¹⁴ I am grateful to Dr. K. Glazier, Chief Librarian, University of Calgary for permission to publish the two Scott letters. (*Notabilia*, Vol. 2.)

to accept your obliging offer to copy the curious tract you mention in Stonefield's library although in doing so I am conscious I abuse both your leisure and your kindness.

I am very desirous to know what the Maitland Club are doing. I am of [the] opinion that the most valuable publications are produced by the Clubbing of five or six members to produce a work which might be something heavy for an individual. Otherwise we limit our publications (our imprints I mean) to tarts and cheese-cakes. I would be most happy to contribute to any thing undertaken in this way as it may be long before I find anything of importance or curiosity sufficient for an individual offering. I wish also to know the amount of the subscription and where I am to pay it before I go to the country for the vacation.

I am with best thanks your obliged
& thankful humble servant

Walter Scott

Edin. 24 June 1829

Letter 4. John Kerr to Sir Walter Scott.

Glasgow 29 June 1829.

Dear Sir,

I now forward to you the promised copy of the tract in Stonefield's library relating to an incident in the Earl of Peterborough's life. The orthography and punctuation tho' often inaccurate I have strictly followed, & all the words underscored by me are printed in Italic letter in the original. I can do no more for you just now, but if, from the scarcity of materials, you are compelled to insert in the text a commentary of the contents of the letter & to swell the book by printing the tract in the Appendix, I shall gladly take the trouble of collating the proofsheets of the latter with the original to ensure perfect accuracy. Nothing however but the want of matter would be likely to lead to this insertion for tho' the personages who figure in the tract are public favorites about whom an author could scarcely err by saying too much, I suspect that nothing followed on the Earl's

seizure, and therefore that the story is exhausted by the letter,¹⁵ and wd be easily exhausted by a page or two of narrative or comment. It is curious that the two grounds of seizure should embrace a common and most uncommon characteristic of your hero—the first his rapid rate of travelling—the second his “being flush with money.” The former could excite surprise nowhere in Europe in 1717—the latter I fancy was a very extraordinary occurrence in the Earl’s life from his cradle to the grave.

The Maitland goes on in rather a thriving way. Our first imprint¹⁶ (which I think you will like exceedingly (I mean the matter of it) only waits for a club vignette to be finished and distributed among the members. Sir Richard’s poetry we do not care so much about, but it also is in *slow* progress.¹⁷ I thought it due to ourselves, since we had taken the name of the good old man, that his verses, mediocre as they certainly are, should be preserved, and the committee were of the same opinion. We have also gone to press with Hamilton of Wishaw’s *Lanarkshire & Renfrewshire*,¹⁸ and from the mass of illustrative matter which has been accumulated from various sources, I calculate that the vol. will prove as amusing and interesting as any work of the kind hitherto published. We intend to print a few copies of this work for sale. The only other work we have resolved to print is one of very limited dimensions: It is an inventory of the

¹⁵ The arrest of the Earl of Peterborough at Bologna on suspicion of an intention to assassinate the Old Pretender created an international incident. The biographers of the Old Pretender differ markedly in their assessment of the incident. See P. Miller, *James* (New York, 1971), pp. 233–4, and B. Bevan, *King James the Third of England*, (London, 1967), pp. 104–5. That the Church of Rome was seriously embarrassed by the incident is suggested by Cardinal Ruffi’s polite behaviour to Peterborough after he was released from the *Fortè Urbana*. See H. C. Stewart, “The exiled Stewarts in Italy.” in *Miscellany of the Scottish History Society*, vii, 71–72. (Edinburgh, 1941).

¹⁶ *The history of the house of Scytoun to the year MDLIX. By Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington, Knight. . . .* (Glasgow, 1829) Maitland Club publication No. 1.

¹⁷ *The Poems of Sir Richard Maitland of Lethingtoun, Knight. . . .* (Glasgow, 1830) Maitland Club publication No. 4.

¹⁸ *Descriptions of the Sherriffdoms of Lanark and Renfrew, compiled about MDCCX by William Hamilton of Wishaw.* (Glasgow, 1831). Maitland Club publication No. 12.

muniments, cloths, vessels etc of the cathedral of Glasgow taken immediately before the reformation.¹⁹

As to contributions we are placed in a very difficult situation. Many of us are most anxious to give our mite, but in our good city we have not half a dozen original M.S.S. (at least as far as I can discover) beyond those of the historian Wodrow.²⁰ Of the compilations of this voluminous writer we have not fewer than fifty or sixty, all Scottish biographies, and all I must add, sufficiently dull. It would do very well to print three or four, partly as specimens & partly because they contain documents of some value interwoven with the narrative; but more than this number I fear it would be injudicious to touch. We appointed a committee some time ago to inspect the repositories of the college etc, but they have not hitherto added any new M.S.S. to our previous stock—on the contrary they have rather diminished what we previously believed to be our stock by discovering some of our fancied originals to be copies. I really do not know to what hand we are now to turn. To Edinburgh I am most unwilling to go if we can find anything valuable in our own city, at least at the very outset of our career; and my reason is that the Maitland may if possible get a local habitation and a name distinct from the Bannatyne & wedded to Glasgow. But I fear all my patriotic partialities for this city of my adoption will & must be sacrificed.—

The plan of joint contributions has been more than once talked of. It is a favourite one indeed, and in a place where there is so much wealth, it is, in my humble apprehension, too much liked. Even in our Maitland, we have members more distinguished for their money than their bibliographical propensities, and unless we get these members to give us handsome contributions we shall never be able to make anything else of them. I wd. like therefore to urge them in rather a different track from that which you suggest, and if I had materials

¹⁹ *Inventory of the ornaments, reliques, jewels, vestments, books &c. belonging to the Cathedral Church of Glasgow MCCCCXXII. With observations on the catalogue of books. By the late John Dillon, Esq. (Glasgow, 1831). Maitland Club publication No. 13.*

²⁰ Robert Wodrow (1679–1734) historian of the Church of Scotland. The Maitland Club published his *Collections upon the lives of the most eminent ministers of the Church of Scotland*. (Vol. I. Glasgow, 1834; Vol. II, Glasgow, 1845–48).

of interest to put into their hands I am pretty certain that I would be successful. Indeed I do not despair of turning out several handsome volumes in this way. But there are others among us from whom it wd be unjust to expect such things and to these your plan has occurred again & again & will be put into practice I dare say very soon.

But I am as usual running away with my subject, or rather it is running away with me. The truth is the Maitland is a hobby, & would occupy my attention much longer than you would find agreeable, if I did not check myself. I have no other apology to plead for my lengthy details—and I would fain hope *you* will not require any other from a young Maitlander tho' rather an old provincial bibliomaniac.

I am
Your most faithful servt.

John Kerr

Letter 5. John Kerr to Sir Walter Scott.

Glasgow 9 July, 1829.

Dear Sir

At a committee meeting of the Maitland Club today, I mentioned your advice respecting the propriety of three or four members joining in the printing of some work of greater magnitude than could well be undertaken by one—and our fellow members expressed their extreme willingness to adopt it. But we are all ignorant of the M.S.S. which in the prosecution of such advice ought to be printed—and in this dilemma, I was requested to apply to you. Perhaps you could indicate a few to us, and if you would take the trouble to do so, you would not only oblige some of the members, but promote the interests of the club. I trust these inducements will procure us a list of such M.S.S. at all events as readily occur to your recollection or as may be easily found among your papers, for I have no idea that you shd take much trouble in the matter. I hope my transcript of

the Peterborough letter reached you, & will prove of some use in your projected biography.

I am
Dear Sir
Your very faithful servant

John Kerr

Letter 6. Sir Walter Scott to John Kerr.

Dear Sir

I have thought a good deal about a work for the Maitland. It strikes me that a very desirable one would be the remainder of Baillies²¹ letters and journals of principal Baillie which would be appropriate to the city of Glasgow and a very useful gift to Scottish History. You are of course well acquainted with the edition in two volumes published at Edinburgh in 1775.²²

It is there said in the advertisement that if the two volumes were well received the publisher had besides as many letters and papers as would make another volume. The work was *not* well received and I have heard the late Mr Creech say that it was a concern in which he engaged at the advice and request of David Hume Principal Robertson Adam Smith and the foremost literati of the day and that notwithstanding it was the only book he lost money by. It certainly ought not to have been the case for the work is in itself most curious and though somewhat long winded carries the most valuable historical information from 1637 to 1662—a very dark period. Now this store of curious matter must still be in existence. The two volumes are said to be taken from a [——] formerly in the possession of Matthew Baillie, Esq. of Carnbroe²³ and another copy is

²¹ Robert Baillie, (1599–1662) Principal of the University of Glasgow. The Maitland Club did not take up Scott's suggestion. Scott's friend, David Laing, was to publish the best edition of Baillie as a Bannatyne Club publication. (3 vols., 1841–43.)

²² This edition was published by William Creech and William Gray, and edited by R. Aiken. The DNB entry on Baillie is doubtful about the assertion that Creech undertook it at the request of Hume, Smith, etc. Scott's testimony in this letter should remove any doubts.

²³ Carnbroe. A village in Lanarkshire.

said to be preserved among the archives of the Church. It would be worthwhile inquiring after these valuable historical documents and securing them from oblivion. You will probably find no difficulty in ascertaining where or what they are and I would suggest their being examined by some competent person in order to judge which might suit the purposes of the club.

I did not write till I had some proposal to make in which I thought the gentlemen of the Maitland Club might be interested. I hope I have now hit upon such a project as may be at once eminently useful to Scottish History and immediately connected with the City of Glasgow. Principal Baillie was a great honour to the University and though perhaps a little over zealous in his theological tenets was nevertheless a modest moderate right judging and well meaning man.

I am Dear Sir

Your very obedient humble servant

Walter Scott

Abbotsford Melrose

2 August

University of Calgary, Alberta